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Michael Klemens, Chairman
Planning & Zoning Commission
Town of Salisbury, Town Hall
P.O. Box 548
27 Main Street, Salisbury, CT 06068

Dear Chairman Klemens and Members of the Commission:

On behalf of my clients, concerned citizens of Lakeville, I have just spent part of this beautiful early spring day in and around Bicentennial Park. My aim is to make some final comments about the design and impact of the proposed Holley Place as judiciously as possible in the role of professional historic preservation consultant and architectural historian.

In reviewing the immediate context of the location, I am once again struck by its neighborhood atmosphere and accessibility of scale, and by how very important it is to consider the effects of introducing this large building to this particular site. In regard to context, I notice that none of the affidavits in support of the project mentions the important streetscape on the north side of Millerton Road. This opposing side of the road, fronting the proposed Holley Place, is a critical part of the project's historic context as the location of the 1830s Holley-Williams House, the district's premier example of Federal-style design, as well as the Farnham Tavern at 7 Millerton Road, and the c. 1830 John Hubbard House at no. 3 Millerton Road. These dwellings are not only important as the three notable Federal/Colonial buildings in the immediate vicinity, but also as freestanding residences, sited on open lawns with setbacks, shade trees, and in some cases—as noted in my previous reports—enhanced with historic outbuildings and some really wonderful examples of historic stone and wooden fencing that contributes to the scale of the district.

Overall, the neighborhood is a lively, mismatched patchwork of open space, residential, and small-scale commercial properties that include these important houses, their associated “street furniture,” and the amalgamation of Victorian-era buildings that dominates the rest of the National Register historic district. The district gets its breathing space and some of its character from its various, intermittent areas of open space. These include its residential lawns; the small plaza into which the Holley Manufacturing Co. Building gracefully sinks; the nearby Holley Manufacturing Millpond and its own lovely associated park; and, of course, Bicentennial Park, a quirky combination of parking and greenery. These small, interesting, and diverse areas of open space are an important part of the local historic context—one reason why the parks were included within the historic district borders. Obliterating Bicentennial Park with a large infill building is in effect destroying an essential component of the district's context, and that of the surrounding neighborhood, and it is important for the town to consider this irreversible step very carefully.

This piece of property, central to the historic district, is not a vacant lot or an empty building site waiting to be filled in. It is a park. In regard to the associated loss of its historic walls, another important, irremediable, outcome of the project, see my report of March 3, 2021.

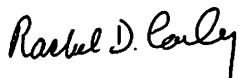
While the historic context of Lakeville, of course, constitutes more than its colonial and Federal architecture, the directive of the gift making the purchase of the Holley Block site obligates the town to focus on that specific heritage. That is yet another reason for the Planning and Zoning Commission to assess how the proposed building responds to the three Federal and eighteenth-century buildings across Millerton Road, and to the broader, and superb, Federal context provided by other architectural examples throughout the town, rather than only to the much later Victorian-era buildings in the district. I have outlined in my March 3 report why I believe that the proposed 12-unit apartment building does not successfully complement that context in regard to material, craftsmanship, siting, size, scale, typology, and bulk.

Walking again through the district today also made me reconsider the critical roles that material and detail play in the context of historic neighborhoods. Yes, synthetic and non-historic materials, brick facings, and plastic window glazing have a way of working their way into neighborhoods, usually because they are cheap and fast to use, but that doesn't make them appropriate, or make them look right in a given context. Nor does it necessarily provide a valid reason for erecting an entirely new building in which such elements dominate, if that building is proposed as a complementary addition to a historic context. Overall, the effects of such changes, which are insidious and cumulative, diminish the quality of detail and dimension that endows historic architecture with much of its distinction. It is this quality that sets historic places apart from the ordinary locales in our towns—and what makes us want to be in those places and to preserve them. When those special characteristics and the atmosphere and delight they engender are lost, they are lost forever.

As noted in my previous report, it not possible to fully assess the impact of the proposed design of Holley Place without parts and specifications that appear to remain absent from the project proposal. These include detailed elevations of the building's exterior entries and railings (what are the final designs?), perspective drawings of all building sides that show siting context (sidewalk railings, concrete ramps, curbs, retaining walls), and a carefully thought-out design of the proposed concrete corner wall to incorporate historic plaques from the stone walls to be demolished. Equally important, clearer specifications for all materials, including windows and exterior entry and garage doors, are needed. All this information is extremely important, because these elements will most definitely contribute to the impact of this building in this historic setting.

Finally, as previously stated, a large, 12-unit apartment building has no precedent in Lakeville's Federal and early eighteenth-century heritage, nor does a building of this type complement a historic neighborhood of freestanding period houses, intimate parks (one to be sadly lost) and cozy storefronts, where the majority of buildings are surrounded by ample space.

Sincerely,



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